

1 **WAGANAKISING ODAWAK STATUTE # 2023-_____**
2 **PROBATE CODE FOR SMALL ESTATES**
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5 **SECTION I. PURPOSE**
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7 The purpose of this statute is to provide for the distribution of small estates of citizens of the
8 Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians regardless of domicile at the time of death, as well
9 as any person domiciled within the territorial jurisdiction of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of
10 Odawa Indians at the time of death. This statute repeals and replaces Waganakising Odawak
11 Statute 2011-003.
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14 **SECTION II. JURISDICTION**
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16 Upon the death of a Tribal citizen, or of any person domiciled within LTBB's territorial
17 jurisdiction, the Tribal Court has jurisdiction to determine the heirs of the decedent, the claims of
18 creditors, and the distribution of property under this statute. The Court's jurisdiction in probate
19 matters shall cover all of the decedent's real property located within the Tribe's territorial
20 jurisdiction, all of the decedent's personal property regardless of location, and any debts owed to
21 the decedent.
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24 **SECTION III. COVERAGE OF THIS STATUTE**
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26 **A.** The provisions of this statute shall be used to distribute the assets of a decedent owning
27 assets valued at \$27,000.00 or less. If a decedent owns more than \$27,000.00 in assets, the Court
28 shall not have jurisdiction to probate the estate under this statute.
29

30 **B.** The coverage limit in the preceding subsection shall apply to decedents who die
31 before January 1, 2024. For decedents who die after December 31, 2023, the specific
32 dollar amount in the preceding subsection shall be adjusted to the specific dollar amount
33 specified in the Michigan Department of Treasury's annual cost-of-living adjustment for
34 RCW 700.3982.
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36 **C.** In accordance with the preceding subsections, the Court administrator shall

1 prominently post the current coverage limit for small estates.
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4 **SECTION IV. DEFINITIONS**

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6 For purposes of this statute, the terms below are defined as follows:
7

8 **A.** “Beneficiary” means a person who is designated to receive something from a legal
9 arrangement or instrument, for example, property designated pursuant to a decedent’s valid will,
10 income from a trust, or the proceeds from an insurance policy.
11

12 **B.** “Coverage Limit” means the maximum value of an estate for the Court to exercise
13 jurisdiction under Section III of this statute.
14

15 **C.** “Decedent” means a deceased person with interests to be determined as demonstrated
16 within this statute.
17

18 **D.** “Domicile” means the permanent home where a person physically resides or intends to
19 return.
20

21 **E.** “Heir” means a person who is entitled under this statute, based upon a family relationship
22 to the decedent, to receive the property of a decedent who dies without a will.
23

24 **F.** “Holographic will” means a will that is written entirely by the decedent that is not
25 witnessed or otherwise does not fully comply with the requirements for a will under this statute.
26

27 **G.** “Immediate Family” means family members generally comprised of the surviving
28 spouse, parents, grandparents, son(s), daughter(s), brother(s) and sister(s) of the decedent.
29

30 **H.** “Intestate” means dying without leaving a will or leaving an invalid will so that the
31 property of the estate passes by the laws of succession rather than by the direction of the
32 deceased.
33

34 **I.** “Legally Incompetent” means a person determined by a court to be mentally or
35 physically unable or unfit to comprehend the nature and consequences of legal proceedings.
36

1 **J.** “Minor” means person who has not reached age 18.

2
3 **K.** “Marriage” means the legal and voluntary union of two persons to the exclusion of all
4 others.

5
6 **L.** “Probate” means the legal process by which applicable Tribal common and written law,
7 state law, or federal law that affects the distribution of the decedent’s estate is applied to
8 determine the decedent’s heirs, approve wills and beneficiaries, and transfer any personal or real
9 property held in trust by a trustee for a decedent to the heirs, beneficiaries, or other persons or
10 entities entitled by law.

11
12 **M.** “Real Property” means property including all improvements and fixtures upon land; that
13 which is incidental and appurtenant to land; all rights, interests, privileges, easements, and
14 encumbrances relating to land, including tenancies and liens of judgment, mortgage, or
15 otherwise; and any portion of these, except that such term shall never include subsurface rights
16 or the title or ownership interest in tribal, trust, or otherwise restricted land.

17
18 **N.** “Testator” means a person who has written a will.

19
20 **O.** “Tribal Court” means the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians Tribal Court.

21
22 **P.** “Tribe” or “LTBB” means the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.

23
24 **Q.** “Territorial Jurisdiction of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians” means all
25 land that is held in trust by the United States government for the benefit of the Tribe.

26
27 **R.** “Will” means the legal instrument that permits a person, the testator, to make decisions
28 on how his or her estate will be managed after death.

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31 **SECTION V. LIMITED JURISDICTION OVER TRANSFERS INVOLVING**
32 **REAL PROPERTY**

33
34 **A.** With respect to lands within the Tribe’s territorial jurisdiction, the Court shall effectuate
35 transfers of land assignments or permanent structures affixed to the land, in accordance with
36 codified Tribal Property and Housing law.

1 **B.** Once the transfer is complete, the Court shall forward a copy of the “transfer” to the
2 Executive Branch for record-keeping purposes. The Court may only effectuate transfer title of
3 real property if the decedent owned the property in fee, with no tribal or federal ownership
4 interests or restrictions.
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7 **SECTION VI. PETITION FOR SMALL ESTATE**
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9 **A.** Filing. The surviving spouse, or if none, any family member of the decedent, the
10 personal representative as designated in decedent will, or a creditor of the decedent may file a
11 petition for small estate. In the case of an unmarried minor, a legal guardian, or person appointed
12 by the Court if a ward of the Court, may file the petition.
13

14 **B.** Time for Filing. The petition should normally be filed within 60 days of the death of
15 decedent.
16

17 **C.** Form of Filing. The petition shall contain the following information:
18

- 19 **1.** The date and location of death of decedent and age of decedent at time of death;
- 20 **2.** A statement of the decedent’s tribal affiliation, if any;
- 21 **3.** The name of the person filing the petition, tribal enrollment number, if any, age,
22 residence, and relationship to the decedent;
- 23 **4.** A statement that the decedent left no will, or that the will is filed with the petition
24 and offered for probate;
- 25 **5.** The names, ages, and relationship to the decedent of all known heirs of decedent,
26 and if decedent dies with a will, the names, ages, and relationship, if any, of all
27 beneficiaries under the will;
- 28 **6.** An inventory list that includes a detailed statement of assets and approximate
29 value of each;
- 30 **7.** A list of names and addresses of the decedent’s creditors, including all possible
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1 creditors that the petitioner can reasonably determine by reviewing the decedent's
2 financial records and papers; and

3
4 **8.** A general list of items that were buried/burned with decedent not to be
5 distributed.

6
7 **9.** A request to designate a person as the personal representative if one is not
8 identified in the will or the person identify in the will is unable or unwilling to serve as
9 the personal representative.

10
11 **D.** Minor or Legally Incompetent Heirs. Upon the filing of the petition for administration,
12 the Court shall ascertain whether or not there are any heirs, legatees, or devisees under the age of
13 18 years or legally incompetent heirs. If so, the Court shall appoint a guardian ad litem to
14 represent the minor or legally incompetent heir's interests until the determination of distribution
15 of belongings is final. The Court will give careful attention to all actions concerning a minor or
16 a legally incompetent heir.

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19 **SECTION VII. APPOINTMENT OF PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE**

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21 The Court shall appoint a person as the Personal Representative.

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24 **SECTION VIII. VALUE OF PROPERTY**

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26 The Personal Representative shall file with the Court a final inventory list of the entire estate. If
27 it appears from the inventory and appraisal that the value of the entire estate, less liens and
28 encumbrances, does not exceed homestead allowance, family allowance, exempt property,
29 administration costs and expenses, reasonable funeral expenses, and reasonable medical and
30 hospital expenses of the decedent's last illness, the personal representative, without giving notice
31 to creditors, may immediately disburse and distribute the estate to the persons entitled to the
32 estate and may file a closing statement as provided in Section XII.

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35 **SECTION IX. HOMESTEAD ALLOWANCE**

1 **A.** A decedent's surviving spouse is entitled to a homestead allowance equal to the coverage
2 limit of this statute.

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4 **B.** If there is no surviving spouse, each minor child and each dependent child of the
5 decedent is entitled to a homestead allowance equal to the coverage limit of this statute divided
6 by the number of the decedent's minor and dependent children.

7
8 **C.** The homestead allowance is exempt from and has priority over all claims against the
9 estate, except administration costs and expenses and reasonable funeral and burial expenses.

10
11 **D.** A homestead allowance is in addition to any share passing to the surviving spouse or
12 minor or dependent child by the will of the decedent, unless otherwise provided, by intestate
13 succession, or by elective share.

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16 **SECTION X. ASSET DISTRIBUTION**

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18 **A.** Upon a showing of evidence, satisfactory to the court, of payment of the expenses for the
19 decedent's funeral and burial and if the balance of a decedent's gross estate consists of property
20 equal to or less than the coverage limit of this statute, the court may order that the Personal
21 Representative distribute the property to the decedent's heirs in accordance with the Will or by
22 intestate succession.

23
24 **B.** Upon a showing of evidence, satisfactory to the court, that the decedent's funeral or
25 burial expenses are unpaid or were paid by a person other than the estate, and if the balance of
26 the gross estate after payment of the expenses would consist of property equal to or less than the
27 coverage limit of this statute, the court shall order that the property be first used to pay the
28 unpaid funeral and burial expenses, or to reimburse the person that paid those expenses, and may
29 order that the balance be turned over to the Personal Representative to distribute to the
30 decedent's heirs in accordance with the Will or by intestate succession.

31
32 **C.** Other than a surviving spouse who qualifies for allowances under this statute or the
33 decedent's minor children, an heir who receives property through an order under this section is
34 responsible, for 63 days after the date of the order, for any unsatisfied debt of the decedent up to
35 the value of the property received through the order. The court shall state this condition in the

1 order.

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3 **D.** If it appears from the inventory and appraisal of the entire estate, less liens and
4 encumbrances, that the value does not exceed administration costs and expenses, reasonable
5 funeral and burial expenses, homestead allowance, family allowance, exempt property, and
6 reasonable medical and hospital expenses of the decedent's last illness, the personal
7 representative, without giving notice to creditors, may immediately disburse and distribute the
8 estate to the persons entitled to the estate and may file a closing statement as provided in this
9 statute.

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12 **SECTION XI. PRIORITY OF CLAIMS**

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14 **A.** If the applicable estate property is insufficient to pay all claims and allowances in full, the
15 personal representative shall make payment in the following order of priority:

16

17 **1.** Costs and expenses of administration.

18

19 **2.** Reasonable funeral and burial expenses.

20

21 **3.** Homestead allowance.

22

23 **4.** Family allowance.

24

25 **5.** Exempt property.

26

27 **6.** Debts and taxes with priority under federal law, including, but not limited to,
28 medical assistance payments that are subject to adjustment or recovery from an estate
29 under section 1917 of the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 1396p.

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31 **7.** Reasonable and necessary medical and hospital expenses of the decedent's last
32 illness, including a compensation of persons attending the decedent.

33

34 **8.** Court costs for actual notice and publication for creditor's claims, and actual
35 notice and publication for determining heirs.

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1 **9.** Claims of indebtedness to the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.

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3 **10.** Debts and taxes to other local or state governmental entities.

4
5 **11.** Debts owing to Citizens of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.

6
7 **12.** Claims of all other creditors.

8
9 **B.** A preference shall not be given in the payment of a claim over another claim of the same
10 class, and a claim due and payable is not entitled to a preference, over a claim not due.

11
12 **C.** If there are insufficient assets to pay all claims in full or to satisfy homestead allowance,
13 family allowance, and exempt property, the personal representative shall proceed to collect the
14 deficiency in a manner reasonable under the circumstances so that each non-probate transfer,
15 including those made under a trust, bears a proportionate share or equitable share of the total
16 burden.

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19 **SECTION XII. CLOSING STATEMENT**

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21 **A.** Unless prohibited by court order or the estate value is more than the coverage limit of this
22 statute, after all listed costs and distributions have been made under subsection (1), a personal
23 representative may close a small estate at any time after disbursement and distribution of the
24 estate by issuing a sworn written statement stating all of the following:

25
26 **1.** To the best knowledge of the personal representative, the value of the entire
27 estate, less liens and encumbrances, did not exceed administration costs and expenses,
28 reasonable funeral and burial expenses, homestead allowance, family allowance, exempt
29 property, and reasonable, necessary medical and hospital expenses of the decedent's last
30 illness.

31
32 **2.** The personal representative has fully administered the estate by disbursing and
33 distributing it to the persons entitled to the estate.

34
35 **3.** The personal representative has sent a copy of the closing statement to all estate
36 distributees and to all creditors or other claimants of whom the personal representative is

1 aware whose claims are neither paid nor barred, and has furnished a full account in
2 writing of the estate administration to the distributees whose interests are affected.

3
4 **B.** Any objection to the closing statement must be filed with the Court within 28 days of the
5 filing of the closing statement. If there are no objections, then the Personal Representative shall
6 receive a certificate of completion.

7
8 **C.** If an action or proceeding involving the personal representative is not pending in the
9 court within one year after the closing statement is filed under this section, the personal
10 representative's appointment terminates.

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13 **SECTION XIII. EXEMPTIONS**

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15 **A.** The Tribe recognizes and adopts the following State of Michigan laws that provide for
16 assets owned by the decedent to pass to the decedent's heirs without the necessity of probate:

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18 **1.** MCL 257.236 provides that the title to motor vehicles of a decedent whose total
19 value does not exceed \$60,000 may be transferred to the heirs by the Michigan
20 Department of State if there are no other assets requiring probate. The Secretary of State
21 must be furnished with proof of death of the registered owner and a certificate setting
22 forth the fact that the applicant is the surviving husband or wife or the applicants are the
23 heirs of the decedent. This is accomplished by filing the papers at the Secretary of State
24 Office.

25
26 **2.** MCL 324.80312 provides for the transfer of water craft without probate
27 proceedings if there are no other assets requiring probate and the value of the water craft
28 is less than \$100,000. This is accomplished by filing the proper papers at the Secretary of
29 State Office.

30
31 **3.** MCL 408.480 provides that wages or fringe benefits in any amount may be
32 delivered to the heirs of the decedent in order of priority as follows: surviving spouse,
33 surviving children, surviving mother or father, and surviving sister or brother.

34
35 **4.** MCL 700.3981 provides that a hospital, convalescent or nursing home, morgue,
36 or law enforcement agency holding cash not exceeding \$500 and wearing apparel of a

1 decedent may deliver the cash and wearing apparel to a person furnishing identification
2 and an affidavit that the person is the spouse, child, or parent of the decedent and that an
3 estate of the decedent is not pending.
4

5 **B.** Monies held by the Tribe either in the form of Per capita payments, payroll wages or
6 fringe, or other Tribal distributions may be delivered to the Decedent's heirs in priority as
7 follows: surviving spouse, surviving children, surviving mother or father, and surviving sister or
8 brother.
9

10 **C.** Individual to whom delivery is made is answerable for the property to a person with a
11 prior right and accountable to a personal representative of the decedent's estate appointed after
12 the delivery.
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15 **SECTION XIV. APPROVAL OF WILLS**

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17 **A.** When any member of the LTBB Community dies, the Tribal Court shall at the request of
18 any interested party determine the validity of the will after giving notice and full opportunity to
19 appear in Court to tell all persons who might be beneficiaries of the decedent.
20

21 **B.** Where the Court finds that the decedent's will is invalid, the Court shall order the
22 administration of decedent's estate as if the decedent had died without a will.
23

24 **C.** Where the Court finds that there is property of the decedent that was left out of a valid
25 will and no other lawful instrument designates a beneficiary, the Court shall order distribution of
26 the undesignated property, by following the procedures under this statute where the decedent
27 dies without a will.
28

29 **SECTION XV. LAWS OF SUCCESSION**

30

31 **A.** If the Decedent dies intestate, then the Personal Representative shall distribute the
32 decedent's assets remaining after satisfaction of the debts and expenses of the estate by the
33 following law of succession:
34

35 **1.** If a spouse survives decedent, all assets shall be distributed to the surviving
36 spouse;

1 **2.** If there is no surviving spouse, all assets shall be distributed equally to decedent's
2 surviving children;

3
4 **3.** If there is no surviving spouse or children, all assets shall be distributed to
5 decedent's surviving parent/s;

6
7 **4.** If there is no surviving spouse, children or parents, all assets shall be distributed
8 equally among decedent's grand-children;

9
10 **5.** If there are no surviving persons listed in 1-4, all assets shall be distributed
11 equally among decedent's surviving sibling/s;

12
13 **6.** If there are no surviving persons listed in 1-5, all assets shall be distributed
14 equally to decedent's surviving first cousin/s;

15
16 **7.** If there are no surviving persons listed in 1-6, any real property within the Tribe's
17 territorial jurisdiction shall escheat to LTBB; any other assets shall be distributed as the
18 Court deems equitable to close friends or caretakers of the decedent.

19
20 **B.** In the case of a decedent without a will, the Court will make such inquiries of the
21 petitioner, family members, the Enrollment Office or other sources as it deems necessary to
22 make sure the list of heirs is submitted with the petition is complete.

23
24 **C.** Beneficiary Criminally Responsible for the Death of the Decedent. Any beneficiary or
25 any heir of the decedent found to be criminally responsible for the death of the decedent shall not
26 be entitled to inherit or receive any interest of the decedent's estate.

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29 **SECTION XVI. NOTICE TO CREDITORS**

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31 **A.** The Personal Representative shall file with the Court a final inventory list of the entire
32 estate. If it appears from the inventory and appraisal that the value of the entire estate, less liens
33 and encumbrances, exceed homestead allowance, family allowance, exempt property,
34 administration costs and expenses, reasonable funeral expenses, and reasonable, necessary
35 medical and hospital expenses of the decedent's last illness, the personal representative shall give
36 notice to creditors. For creditors who may be unknown or are not reasonably ascertainable, the

1 Court shall issue a notice to creditors by publication. The notice shall be published on the Tribal
2 website, in a Tribal newspaper and in one other local newspaper of general circulation for two
3 consecutive publication dates and proof of publication shall be filed in the case record.
4

5 **B.** The last date for creditors to file claims against the estate shall be 45 days from receipt of
6 notice or from the second date of publication, and are thereafter barred from any claim.
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9 **SECTION XVII. PAYMENT OF CREDITOR'S CLAIMS**
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11 All tangible personal property of the decedent that is of a unique keepsake nature, such as art,
12 family heirlooms and photographs, is exempt from sale to pay for claims of creditors. The Court
13 shall not order sale of such tangible personal property of the decedent to satisfy any liens or
14 judgments of creditors.
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17 **SECTION XVIII. FORM OF PROBATE PLEADINGS**
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19 The Tribal Court shall determine what documents must be filed in a small estate case.
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22 **SECTION XIX SEVERABILITY**
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24 In the event that any phrase, provision, part, paragraph, subsection or section of this statute is
25 found by a court of competent jurisdiction to violate the Constitution, laws, ordinances or
26 statutes of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, such phrase, provision, part,
27 paragraph, subsection or section shall be considered to stand alone and to be deleted from this
28 statute, the entirety of the balance of the statute to remain in full and binding force and effect.
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31 **SECTION XX. EFFECTIVE DATE**
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33 Effective upon signature of the Executive or 30 days from Tribal Council approval whichever
34 comes first or if the Executive vetoes the legislation, then upon Tribal Council override of the
35 veto.
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CERTIFICATION